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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000386

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR HEARS BAYELSA GOVERNOR'S VIEWS  
ON COMBATING MILITANCY IN HIS STATE AND ON THE NEW NIGER  
DELTA MINISTRY AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

REF: ABUJA 1898

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBIN R. SANDERS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador led an interagency team to Bayelsa September 27 for a one-day orientation trip to look at possible partnerships through a pilot program that would focus on youth needs and development (see septel on these issues), but also had the opportunity, on the three hour drive from Warri in Delta State to Bayelsa,s capital Yenagoa, to have a one-on-one with Governor Timipre Silva on current militancy and security issues in his state. Silva highlighted his safe haven efforts on behalf of militant leader Joshua MacGyver because of the latter,s assistance to the Nigerian Joint Military Task Force (JTF) on locating other militant camps, particularly those of militant leader "Boyloaf" and his 600-strong followers. Silva also noted that he had two recent meetings with President Yar,Adua September 19 and 24, in which the latter said he was considering a restructuring proposal that would offer the Niger Delta conflict states equity shares in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Silva also said that he raised with Yar,Adua the possibility of providing amnesty to MacGyver since he was giving accurate intelligence to the JTF on militant locations; Yar,Adua reportedly supported this idea. The Bayelsa Governor also noted that the new Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), General Dike, had just been in Bayelsa and met with him as well as MacGyver. The Governor emphasized that he, as well as his counterparts in Rivers and Delta States, were extremely pleased with "the new direction and commitment to do the right thing on the Niger Delta (ND) by Yar,Adua, particularly as regards to the ND Ministry, and technical committee, as well as he willingness to listen, respond, seek their advice, and hold meetings with them." End Summary.

¶2. (C) During the Ambassador and the U.S. Mission,s Interagency/section team visit (DoD/OSC, USAID, and Lagos POL-ECON and PAS) to Bayelsa on September 27 to examine ways for project and program development in the areas of agriculture, education and youth conflict management, she had an opportunity to hear the Governor,s views on how he is addressing militancy and security in his state, a readout from his recent meetings with President Yar,Adua on Niger Delta (ND) issues, as well as about his work on fiscal responsibility and anti-corruption (for the latter two points and development issues see septel). This sidebar discussion

with the Governor on militancy and more details on the security situation took place on the three hour drive from Warri, capital of Delta State, to Bayelsa,s capital, Yenagoa. Office of Security Cooperation Chief and USAID Mission Director were also in the van.

¶3. (C) On the militancy and security issues, Governor Silva highlighted his work and that of the JTF with militant leader Joshua MacGyver to ferret out militant leaders such as "Boyloaf" and others. "MacGyver is supplying useful intelligence to the JTF and has been helpful thus far in destroying some key militant locations," Silva explained. He added that since early August he has been providing safe haven support to MacGyver since many of his former militant colleagues are after him for supporting the JTF. The Governor noted that he moved MacGyver around several times a day for his protection, including at times in and out of his Governor,s Mansion. Ambassador asked what made MacGyver decide to come in from the cold as a militant. Silva said that MacGyver had a secondary education, was about 22 years old and had explained to the Governor he "was tired of the life and hoped that he could continue his education and pursue his desire to become a lawyer." The Bayelsa Governor added that there was not "really much for the militants to do with the money they earned from bunkering, etc., because they could not go anywhere to spend it, and only reaped the limited benefits it provided to them within the areas of the creeks," he concluded. Silva said that he supported having MacGyver granted amnesty since he was providing good intelligence to the JTF, and had raised this issue with President Yar,Adua in his last meeting with him on September

¶24. In retaliation, "Boyloaf" had attacked MacGyver,s old camp, but there were only a few followers who had remained there. (Note: Later in the day, Ambassador and OSC Chief had the opportunity to be introduced to Bayelsa State JTF Commander Musa, and the District Head of the State Security Service (SSS) at the Governor,s Mansion. We also note in a September 24 meeting between Ambassador and Delta State traditional leader and statesmen Chief E.K. Clark, the latter claimed that he had submitted a list of militants to Yar,Adua to also consider for amnesty. End note).

¶4. (C) Overall, Silva said, he supported amnesty because this was the best vehicle to separate militants from criminals. "Anyone left out after the amnesty and still engaged in violence would and could be viewed as a criminal and we would go after them in a law enforcement capacity," he concluded. "If there is some sort of amnesty given to militants with real political and development issues, then those that remain outside of this framework are the criminals, and they can be dealt with in a comprehensive law enforcement strategy that would have to encompass all three conflict-prone Delta Region states at one time. Right now," he continued, "there is a piecemeal approach which allows both militants and criminals to move from state-to-state when the pressure gets too much in one state in the Region," he summarized.

¶5. (C) Ambassador then asked Silva how well he knew "Boyloaf"; he said fairly well, and that he was committed to working with the JTF to catch him, adding that "we are eventually going to get him." The Governor added that "Boyloaf" was not educated, is about 34-35 years old, and is known to have about 600 men who move between Rivers and Bayelsa. He noted that the new Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) Dike had been in Bayelsa and Rivers earlier in the week and that he had a good feeling about him and his commitment to do "the right thing in the Delta Region." Silva explained that General Dike was from the Asaba area of Delta State (its capital), but in his view more ethnically an Igbo, although he admitted those in the Asaba area do ot consider themselves Igbo. The Governor also said that Dike had an opportunity to meet MacGyver while he was in Bayelsa. In his meeting with the CDS, Silva claimed that he told General Dike that the JTF needed a more comprehensive tri-State strategy in order to "prevent the militants from moving from state-to-state in the Delta Region when military pressure was put on them in only one state at a time." He added that he

disagreed with Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, whose position is to bomb the militants, because in his view this was causing too much collateral damage, which in the end gains the militants more support. In most cases the militants use the communities as shields from the JTF, he stated.

¶16. (C) Ambassador asked about militant leader Henry Okah as she had been hearing that he was ill with kidney disease. The Bayelsa Governor said he had heard this also and that Okah was very ill, but had "mixed views" on Okah because he blamed him for what he had done to the Delta Region by playing a key role in bringing arms into the region in the first place, which in his view was the crux of the current problems in Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta States as regards to both militancy and criminality. (Note: Ambassador had heard that Okah would be moved to an SSS site in Jos and given medical treatment to address problems with his kidney disease in the next couple of weeks. End note).

¶17. (C) Silva took time to recount additional points from a September 19 meeting with President Yar'Adua on which he had already briefed the Ambassador (reftel) and his views on the establishment of a Niger Delta (ND) Ministry and technical committee. In addition to pushing his slate of candidates for the new Minister position with the strong caveat that the person must come from the Delta Region, Silva said that his other criteria included that the person had to be respected, a good manager, and maybe even a technocrat. Ambassador noted that she had heard from other contacts that the senior government leadership wanted and was looking for someone from the region for the job, and at one time had heard Ibori's name mentioned as being on a short list. Silva said that although Yar'Adua did not show his hand on who was his top choice or on his short list, he had not heard that the government was seriously considering someone like Ibori as this would be suicide and a real disappointment. She then asked Governor Silva his views on the new ND technical committee, and how well he knew the new chairperson Ledum Mittee, noting that she would be meeting him on September 30.

The Governor said he knew Mittee but not well, but was pleased that the latter had reached out and asked each governor of the five Delta Region States to submit 2-3 names of individuals that they would want to serve on the committee.

¶18. (C) Silva then underscored that he was pleased with the "new direction of Yar'Adua on the Niger Delta (ND)," and that he was pleased that the President had finally decided to personally take control of the ND issue and take it out of the hands of VP Jonathan's office, showing some leadership in this area. In addition, the new ND Ministry provides the Delta Region "for the first time, a seat at the table, at the Federal Executive Council (FEC), and gives us the best hope in a long time that there might be real progress on ND issues," he concluded. "People are tired of the insecurity and lack of development and many of the boys (meaning militants) want a new and different kind of life. We need to work with them and encourage them to come out of the creeks, and separate the militant issue from the criminal issue," he summed up.

¶19. (C) In wrapping up before we reached Bayelsa's capital Yenagoa, Governor Silva said that President Yar'Adua had also shared his current thinking as regards to restructuring the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, NNPC. He said that the Nigerian President was considering a proposal that would given the three conflict Niger Delta states equity in NNPC, but had to work with the Governors on what percentages of equity shares would be fair. Silva said he told the Nigerian President that he liked the idea of equity shares from NNPC and supported this approach. The Ambassador suggested that in these discussions that it might be useful to look at models and best practices on the development of any kind of equity share program before pursuing this path to ensure that it is done in a fair and transparent manner. Ambassador briefly asked, as the road trip was coming to a close, what Silva thought should be done with the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) since it had not done an effective job on

development in the region, in addition to problems with transparency and corruption. Silva concluded that NDDC should be brought under the new Niger Delta Ministry as an agency instead of a parastatal.

¶10. (C) Comment: The three hour drive to Yenagoa proved useful and informative as Silva shared his current thinking and actions on security in his state and his work with the JTF to ferret out militants and criminals. He also provided the first news we have heard on what Yar,Adua is thinking as regards to restructuring NNPC, particularly the idea of an NNPC equity share program for Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta States. Meanwhile, the Presidential Villa is being tight-lipped about its short list for Minister of the Niger Delta and speculation remains that the new government will be announced sometime soon after Nigeria,s October 1 Independence Day celebrations. We have heard names ranging from ex-governor Ibori to others as those being considered, but lately we have not heard any front runner,s name. If the government was considering Ibori for the job at anytime as reported on Internet blogs and elsewhere, it does not appear to be the case now. We raised our concern about the Ibori possibility for this position as did the UK, according to its High Commissioner. The Niger Delta technical committee seems to be moving forward, and Ambassador will meet with the Committee Chair September 30.

¶11. (U) This cable was drafted in Abuja.

BLAIR